

Negotiating the Trajectory(ies) of a Doctoral Student 1

Apprentice; Collaborator; Colleague; Competitor; Negotiating the Trajectory(ies) of a Doctoral Student: An Activity Theory Perspective

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Abstract

This paper will conceptualise, via an 'Activity Theory' approach, the journey of a Doctor of Education (RHD) candidate from Masters student – through the coursework component of the EdD programme, and then onto a Doctor of Education Dissertation. In so doing it seeks to determine whether such an approach is able to 'capture' the subjective nature of such a journey. The RHD journey implicitly and explicitly involves membership of an academic community of practice and the author's various experiences of this membership will provide the 'dataset' for this paper. Whilst drawing on earlier Activity Theory iterations, Engestrom's (1987) 3rd Generation Activity Systems theory, will be primarily utilised to position myself in this system of practice. Drawing on the work of Stevenson (2004), the paper will explore how the elements of Rules and Division of Labour mediate the author's doctoral experiences. Tensions and complexities (contradictions in Activity Theory terms) within the experience including the influence of social capital; relationships with supervisor(s); relationships with the wider Griffith University community; and access to publishing opportunities in academic journals are conceptualised as avenues for the author to transform himself as researcher and also transform the culture of his research community. The RHD journey, whilst clearly occurring within a specific research community, and defined to a significant extent by the contradictory elements of this community, is at the same time an intensely private experience and this reflection will consequently draw on my lived experience during various stages of the journey. The academic experience is a dynamic one in terms of the author's various subjectivities – student, apprentice researcher, author, colleague, and competitor. As a way of framing these subjectivities, Membership Categorisation (Baker, 1997), will be used as a way of theorising the role of an active subject choosing from a range of available roles, and responding to a range of discourses within a particular context.

This paper is a personal reflection which attempts to clarify and articulate perspectives of my Research Higher Degree (RHD) journey via a systems approach. By way of background, my story thus far is not too dissimilar to the journey of many others involved in university life. I am a primary school teacher, currently working as a deputy at a Gold Coast school. I have been a deputy for the past 12 years and, during this time, have completed two Masters Degrees and the coursework component of my Doctoral Degree. The research project will be completed in 2009. I am also a part time tutor at Griffith University. The doctoral journey I will chart, whilst similar to the journey of many other students who have 'run this course' is also distinctly unique and this account will therefore draw on phenomenological perspectives. This paper serves two purposes; firstly, it is an account of my doctoral experience which will be shared with others at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) 2008 International Education Research Conference; and secondly, via the actual writing process, it will facilitate a greater personal understanding of the very experience I am reflecting upon. The impetus for this paper came via an invitation from Dr Glenn Finger to write and present an account of my doctoral journey as part of a Symposium presentation at the conference named above.

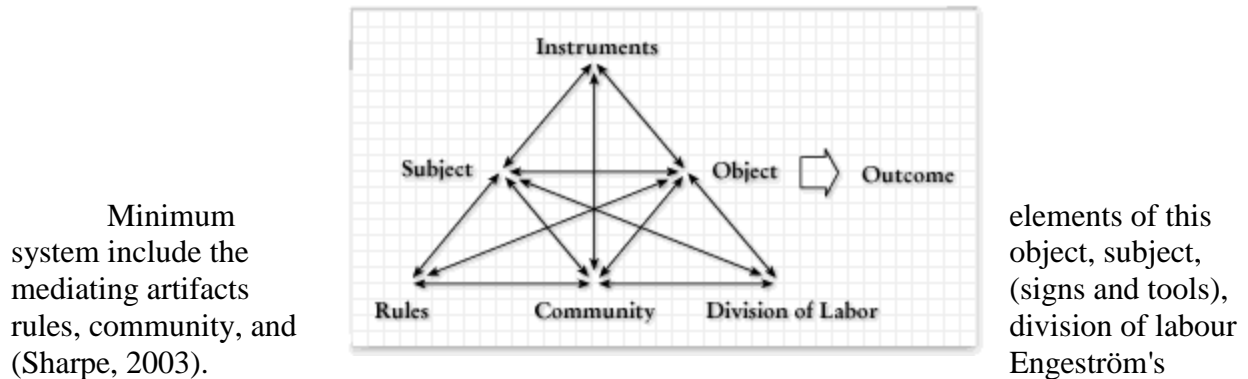
Brown, Finger, and Reeves (2007, p. 8), in their introduction to the book 'Educational Research: Who Needs It?', depict the educational journey of a RHD as occurring in a community of practice in which 'participants assist each other to become full participants in the research culture of the community'. According to Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) a community of practice is 'a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice'. In broad terms such a community consists of four interrelated elements – knowing, doing, participation, and legitimacy. This perspective promotes a view of knowing as being 'activity by specific people in specific circumstances' (Brown, et al., 2007, p.52) and therefore resides in the socio-cultural domain. Whilst also based in the social constructivist domain, Activity Theory (AT) differs to a 'communities of practice' approach in relation to mediation by physical and conceptual tools; and in its emphasis on the Division of Labour and Communal Rules which govern the interaction between elements of a particular social context. The mediation of these elements is a critical component of the RHD experience and therefore a brief synopsis of Activity Theory is required.

Activity Theory

Activity Theory is a commonly accepted name for a line of theorising and research initiated by the founders of the cultural-historical school of Russian psychology, Lev Vygotsky and Alexie Leont'ev in the 1920's and 1930's (Engeström, Miettinen & Punamaki, 1999). Activity theory is an approach that aims to understand individual human beings in their natural, daily circumstances. This understanding occurs through an analysis of the genesis, structure, and processes of their activities. In defining Activity, Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the individual, Leont'ev (1981) emphasises the individual in activity and Engeström (1987) emphasises the individual within an activity system. Regardless of the emphasis, human activity is always oriented to the achievement of goals and motives (Nardi, 1996) and in this sense activity implies an action done in order to transform some object Engeström (1999). Activity is understood as a purposeful interaction of the subject with the world, a process in which mutual transformations between the poles of "subject-object" are accomplished (Leont'ev, 1978, in Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006).

Yrjo Engeström reconceptualised the primary Activity Theory heuristic from the simple subject-tools-object triangle into a six element model (Figure 1) which has become an analytical tool used in a wide range of concrete research (Gordon, 2006; Romeo & Walker, 2002; Lloyd & Cronin, 2002).

Figure 1. An Activity System (Engeström, 1987, p. 37)



(1987) framework provides a schematic for the structure of activity and can help to describe the relation between individual and community in activity. The most basic relations are a subject (person) oriented to accomplishing some object (outward goal, concrete purpose, or objectified motive) using a historically-constructed tool. To this simple triangular relationship, community was added, generating two more links; a subject relates to the community via rules (norms, conventions); and the community relates to the object via division of labour (organization of processes related to the goal) (Roschelle 1998). The mechanism for growth and development for individuals and the community in an activity system is the resolution of contradictions thus leading to transformations and expansions.

According to Kuutti (1996), a contradiction is a misfit within elements; e.g. Rules, between them, between different activities, or between different developmental phases of a single activity. Contradictions exist when external influences change elements of activities causing imbalances between them. Consequently Activity Systems are almost always in flux as they work through contradictions which manifest themselves as problems, ruptures, breakdowns, or clashes (Scanlon & Issroff, 2005). For example, in a university context, a major contradiction is the view of students to be educated versus students to make a profit from. The purpose of this section has been to briefly explain Activity Theory, in particular 3rd Generation Activity Systems as these systems will provide the scaffold for the explication of my journey.

RHD Journey – A systems approach

I have, for the purpose of the initial conceptualisation, diagrammatically summarised perspectives of my journey via the use of three interconnected Activity Systems – namely System One -Attainment of Doctoral Qualification (See Figure 2), System Two -Academic Career Trajectory (See Figure 3), and System Three - EPS Research Community (Figure 4). Prior to discussing each system in specific terms a number of points need to be clarified.

The first consideration is that the systems, whilst depicted as separate Systems, are inter-related and the same or similar activities can be completed at all Systems – for instance, a piece of writing might be an assignment in the EdD Coursework required at System One, and a conference paper at System Three thereby becoming a contribution to the research culture of

EPS. In a similar vein, activities are also multifaceted and often only distinguished by their underlying, and sometimes unseen, motives. Using the same example, the assignment may be written with the overt motive of passing a course but with the additional goals of later presentation at a conference; and with the intent of eliciting positive responses from supervisors or the wider academic community.

The second key consideration is that these systems are not linear. I am simultaneously positioned in Systems One, Two and Three and my positioning is varied according to the subjectivities I choose to employ. Brown et al. (2007, p. 12) make a similar point via the concepts of 'voice' and 'epistemology'. In their paper they use the abstracts and the later papers as their data and attempt to distinguish where the authors of these papers are located in relation to their RHD journey in terms of 'peer', 'student', or 'educator'. Whilst 'officially', in terms of Rules and Division of Labour, I belong in System One as an EdD student, I am simultaneously, but non officially, operating within System Two as a presenter at the 2008 RHD conference and at System Three as a peer in the EPS community via my contribution to its research output. The identification of these three systems is for ease of discussion only and does not indicate that I am not involved in many other systems – eg Marymount Primary School System, Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) System, and Queensland Society for Information Technology in Education (QSITE) System. The three systems presented here have been emphasised as they are directly related to the topic in question – namely the RHD journey and issues of voice, membership, and transformation of knowledge.

The third and final consideration relates to my depiction of 'tool' use. In terms of my systems, tool use refers primarily to mental models, paradigms, and semiotic signs rather than as physical tools as traditionally appear in Activity System models (e.g. Elks, 2005; Dale, 2003). Whilst not negating the use of powerful tools (laptops, online environments, and databases) my conceptualisation of tool use relates most closely to that of Vygotsky (1978) who conceived of tools as including language, semiotics, signs and symbols. In this sense, (academic credentials, publications, and conference presentations) are examples of the mental tools I utilise to mediate the relationship between subject (myself) and objects (completion of EdD, academic career, contributor to research culture) in the attainment of the overall goal in the three systems. With these three considerations in mind, a closer examination of each of these systems is required.

System One - EdD

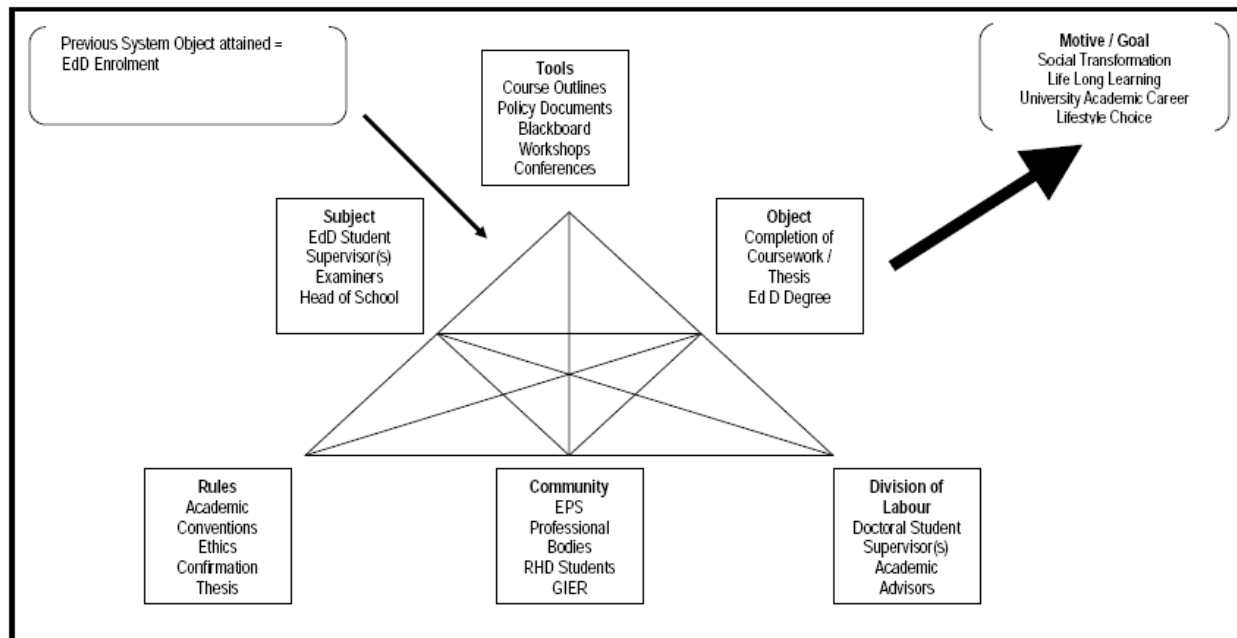
System One (Figure One) has as its object the Attainment of Doctoral Qualification and the key elements of this system are indicated below.

- Object – completion of coursework / thesis; reception of EdD
- Subjects – doctoral student; supervisor(s); Head of School; other academics
- Tools - Course Outlines; Policy Documents; Blackboard; Workshops; and Conferences
- Community – Griffith University; EPS (Gold Coast); GIER; RHD Students; Professional Bodies
- Rules - Academic Conventions; Ethical Clearance; Confirmation Seminar; Government Regulations (Funding / Priorities)
- Division of Labour - Doctoral Student; Supervisor(s); Academic Advisors; Examiners

System One is characterised by clearly defined Rules and Division of Labour. The rules for thesis completion are clearly set out in numerous university documents and are communicated regularly with students. Likewise, guidelines regarding the roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors are described. At this point in the journey tensions may arise between student and supervisor(s). These possible tensions include differences of theoretical perspectives between student and supervisors; differences of expectations in terms of publishing and tutoring strategies; coursework related issues; and variations in thesis expectations across different disciplines. In my personal RHD journey, System One has been, apart from the ever present tension that exists between my full time work and my doctoral commitments free of many of the tensions noted above. My relationships with my supervisors and other academics have been productive and beneficial to me as a student.

Figure 2. System One (Attainment of EdD)

RHD Journey Conceptualised via Activity Systems (Engestrom, 1987)
System 1 (Attainment of EdD) – Adapted from Stevenson 2004



System One intersects primarily with System Two at the level of a tool. As mentioned previously, tools are predominantly conceptualised in this paper as mental constructs. In this instance the Doctoral Qualification becomes a tool which is used to assist in the attainment of the immediate goal of System Two - an academic career. The reception of a doctoral qualification is the end of the RHD journey.

Depending on the motivation of the particular student the reception of an EdD may be useful in becoming a School Principal; a Senior Educational Officer; or an Educational Consultant. Clearly the resultant use of the doctoral qualification is subject to the overarching goal of its recipient and it is in this context that the qualification becomes a (tool) which mediates a multitude of possible outcomes. The tool remains the same but the use of the tool differs dependent on the motive of the subject.

Many of the activities described at System One will reoccur, some simultaneously, at System Two and System Three. My activities at System One lead both to the object of System

One (EdD qualification) but also to the objects of System Two (Academic Career) and System Three (Research Culture). By way of example, I was required during the coursework component of the course to submit assignments – At System One, various lecturers, marked my assignments and provided a university grade; At System Two, with the help of my supervisor, these assignments become additions to my publications record and CV; and at System Three these assignments are reworked as conference papers and presentations and become part of a communal presentation with research peers.

Clearly then, the completion of a thesis provides the key tool to be utilised at a later stage in the attainment of an academic position and it labels the subject who is now recognised, at least officially, as a qualified academic. The attainment of this qualification has implications for my subjectivities at System Two and System Three in relation to Rules, Division of Labour and Community Membership and these implications are explored in the analysis section of this paper.

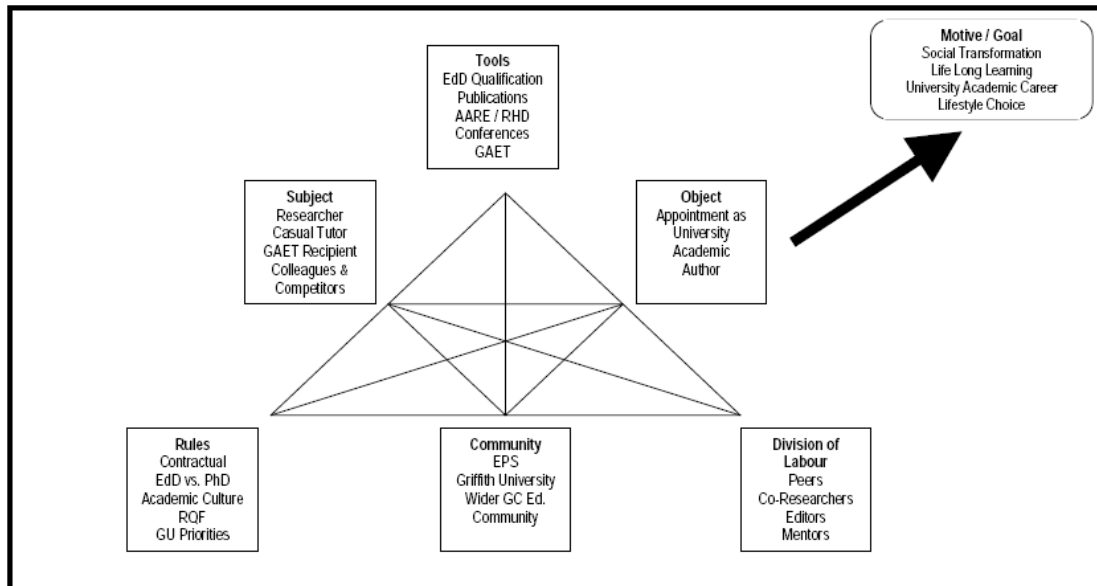
System Two – Academic Career

System Two (Figure Three) has as its object the attainment of an Academic position and the key elements of this system are indicated below.

- Object – Work as a full time academic – (teaching, researching, writing, and community partnerships)
- Subject – Qualified Researcher; Casual Tutor; GAET Winner; Deputy; Colleague
- Tools - EdD Qualification; Publications; AARE Symposium; RDH Conferences; GAET Award
- Community - EPS (Gold Coast); Griffith University; Wider Gold Coast Educational Community
- Rules – Contractual; EdD vs. PHD (Philosophy on relative worth); Academic Culture; RQF; GU Priorities
- Division of Labour – Peers; Co-Researchers; Editors; Mentors

System Two is the most complex of all of the systems and I am positioned in System Two in a multitude of ways – RHD student, tutor, school based personnel, writer, competitor, presenter and the negotiation of these subjectivities, via Rules and Division of Labour in an Activity System sense, and via Member Categorisation in the subjective sense, is the critical component of my RHD journey.

Figure 3. System Two (Academic Career)



System One was characterised by clearly defined Division of Labour and Rules; however, System Two is more loosely constructed. In terms of Division of Labour, I am solely responsible for activities within this system which pertain to the attainment of an academic career. The university is not required to provide human or material support as the ‘contractual agreement’ which existed in System One, whereby supervisors and lecturers were appointed to assist me and where government accountabilities needed be met, is no longer a mandated requirement. There are no clearly delineated set of rules which govern how I attain my object nor are there any university requirements that I proceed any further with my study other than the attainment of the doctoral degree.

Whilst limited official university rules exist at System Two (academic writing, ethics etc), the primary tensions which arise within this system occur in relation to the explicit and tacit rules of the particular EPS (Gold Coast) community, as they relate to career trajectories. In meeting the key prerequisites for academic employment the stated ‘rules’ are that (amongst other criteria) that a doctoral qualification and a publications record is required. These overt statements belie, as I see it, some tacit realities of the system which impact on my objective to become an academic – is an EdD ‘worth’ the same as a PhD? Which journals is your work published in? What impact did these publications have? Was your thesis equivalent to other thesis? Which research group are you associated with? These realities are ones that have caused me much reflection – particularly the discourse around the EdD / PhD and whether I should ‘upgrade’ my EdD to a PhD. It is only recently that I decided to complete the EdD rather than switch to a PhD programme at the end of the coursework component.

Both System One and System Two become integrated with System Three at the level of the subject. As was the case with System Two, I am positioned in this system in a multitude of roles – tutor, RHD student, author, school based person, and hopefully, at some stage, future academic. System Three provides the overarching socio-cultural context which both shapes and is shaped by my activity at System One and Two. System Three is the system which Brown et al. (2007) are referring to in their paper as the EPS (Gold Coast) Community of Practice. Elements of this Community of Practice, which I have expressed as elements in an Activity System, are outlined below.

System Three – EPS (Gold Coast)

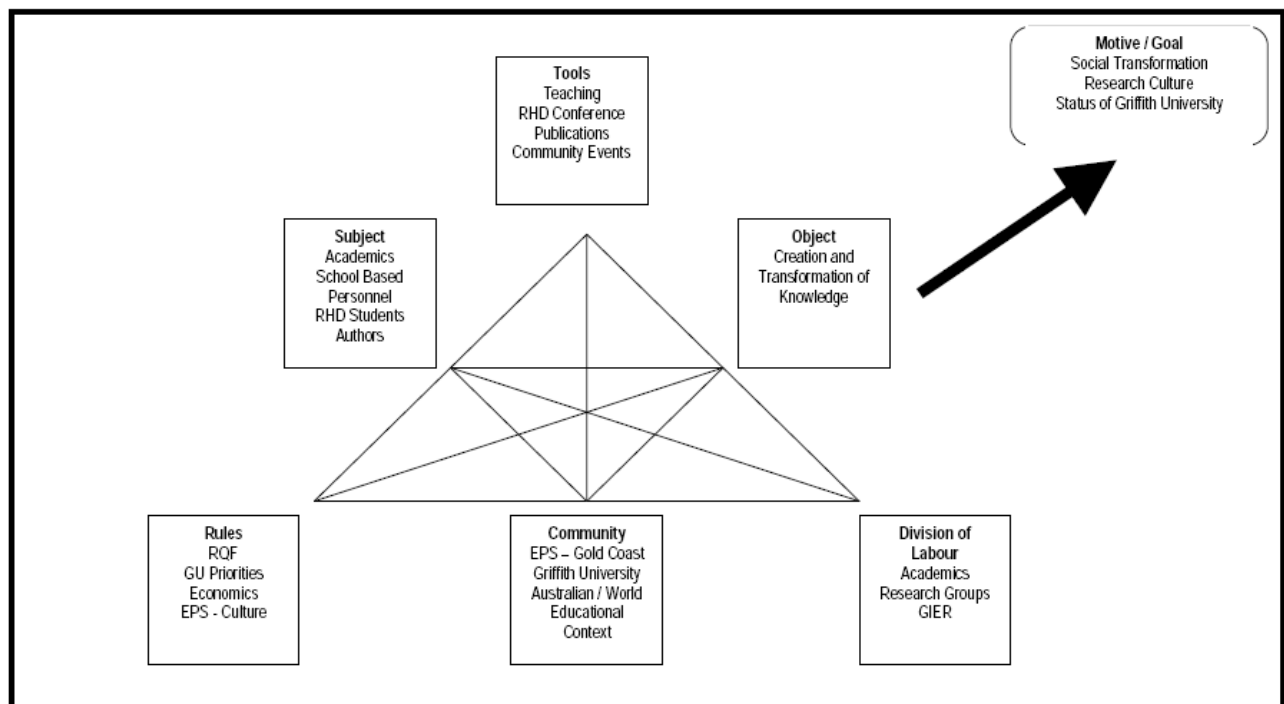
System Three (Figure Four) has as its object the creation and transformation of knowledge

- Object – Transformation of knowledge, research culture, academic membership
- Subject – Academics, School Based Personnel, RHD Students, Authors
- Tools - Teaching Programs, Publications, Community Events, RHD Conference
- Community - EPS – Gold Coast, Griffith University, Australian / World Educational Context
- Rules – RQF, GU Priorities, Economics, EPS - Culture
- Division of Labour – Academics, Research Groups, GIER

Tensions within this system, as they did in System Two, again revolve primarily around Rules and Divisions of Labour but with different emphasis. Whilst tensions are evident in relation to Rules, the EPS tensions are, by and large, similar tensions which effect most schools within Griffith University and, I imagine, the majority of Australian Universities. They revolve around the Research Quality Framework, Government Funding Arrangements, Industrial Awards, Publishing Criteria, Community Service and the like. Specific to Griffith University are the various research priorities as established by the Pro Vice Chancellor or individual Deans / Heads of School.

Figure 4. System Three (EPS – Gold Coast)

RHD Journey Conceptualised via Activity Systems (Engestrom, 1987)
System 3 (EPS - Gold Coast – Research Practice)



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The Division of Labour is more unique to each individual school and therefore the tensions I identify at System Three are more particular to EPS (Gold Coast). Billett (2006) recognises that many of the tensions which are evident in workplaces result from variations in Workplace Affordances. Briefly stated, Workplace Affordances are the kinds of activities that individuals are offered (afforded) as a result of the product of workplaces' micro-social processes, that is, the exercise of the norms and practices (Billett, 2006, p. 60). EPS affordances include allocation of office space and secretarial support, publishing opportunities, tutoring positions etc. As workplaces are shaped by hierarchies of control, official and non official groups, personal relationships, and cultural practices, the distribution of such affordances reflect political and power relationships (Billett, 2006) and impact differently across place, space and time.

Workplace affordances are dynamic and are subject to constant change in terms of tasks, goals, interactions, participants and relations. This dynamism is reflected in the various Division of Labour emphases in the three systems in which I am a subject but they are equally as dynamic within each individual system. Importantly for my academic journey, these inter-psychological processes (Vygotsky, 1978) negate a concept of a fixed cognitive legacy in terms of a Community of Practice and instead indicate that my personal and academic transformation is a negotiated, on-going, intrapersonal enterprise. From an Activity Theory perspective, tensions in a system are not, by definition, negative as they provide the impetus for resolution, expansion and transformation.

As a means of demonstrating some of the tensions that I have identified, and simultaneously illustrating some key points of my journey, the current activity (i.e. the preparation of this AARE Paper and its later presentation at this Symposium) will now be analysed. Table One outlines the three systems and indicates some key tensions which have been identified previously and which will be resolved later in this paper explain more here what I am trying to do with this table and this analysis. Reflecting upon the experience of preparing this paper for the AARE activity, and upon my RHD journey overall, it is apparent that the key tensions in these systems are those which mediate my individual experience with the EPS Community of Practice in terms of the achievement of my personal goal and the achievement of the goals of the EPS.

Table One – Tensions and Transformations Evident in AARE Symposium Presentation

	Activity System
System One - EdD	<p>Deputy vs. Student (Absence / distraction from primary employment is always underlying tension)</p> <p>Doctoral Student vs. Future Academic (Presentation of paper not central to System One Object)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive - further develop understanding of AT

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative - detracts from EdD tasks e.g. confirmation seminar <p>Enhances relationship between Supervisor / Student</p>
System Two – Academic Career	<p>Deputy vs. Potential Academic (Absence / distraction from primary employment is always underlying tension)</p> <p>No tension as presentation of paper directly related to System Two Object</p> <p>Enhances relationship between Supervisor / Student</p>
System Three – EPS - COP	<p>Deputy vs. EPS Membership (Absence / distraction from primary employment is always underlying tension)</p> <p>Presentation of paper directly related to System Three Object</p> <p>Tension returns re membership of EPS community</p> <p>Invitation to be part of the EPS community</p> <p>Supervisor / Student relationship renegotiated</p>

The articulation of my RHD journey thus far, via the use of Activity Systems has provided an account of how the various system elements in which I am involved are inter-related and have shaped my particular RHD journey. They can be likened, in a sense, to a list of chess moves which readers can follow to determine an outcome.... Nd6 Re1+ 34. Kh2 Nxf2 35. Nxf7+ Kg7 36. Ng5+ Kh6 37. Rxh7+ 1-0 (for chess buffs, these are the final moves of the historic match between IBM's Deep Blue Computer and Kasparov). Although mentioned in passing, what is missing from an Activity Theory explanation of my journey is a clear picture of what makes my journey unique. This omission is a consequence of the lack of emphasis on the Subject in Activity Theory conceptualisations. This omission is recognised by numerous authors in their critique of Activity Theory in general and Engeström's Activity Systems in particular (Valsiner, 2000; Billett, 2003 / 2006; Wheelahan, 2004; Daniels, 2008). These authors believe that, in attempting to explicate the influence of the system on the individual, the individual has in fact become 'over socialised' and become depicted as merely a representation of the society in which they live. Tolman (1999, p. 82) argues further that Activity Theory depicts the individual as 'society's gift where the individual is society manifested in a single organism'. In my view, arguments which debate the exact nature of the individual – social dichotomy are useful from an ontological and epistemological standpoint but may not be particularly helpful in a practical context and therefore a new synthesis is required. My contribution towards this synthesis is presented in Larkin (2008) where a way forward is proposed which argues that the established dichotomy of individual and social is neither accurate nor productive. Vygotsky emphasised that the distinction between natural (individual) and cultural (social) development was a conceptual, theoretical one, and in actual practice the two lines could hardly be distinguished. (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000, p. 366). I will further argue that the issue of social and individual should not be considered along dialectical but rather relational lines. See also Valsiner (2000) and Billett (2006).

Reconceptualisation of the Academic World

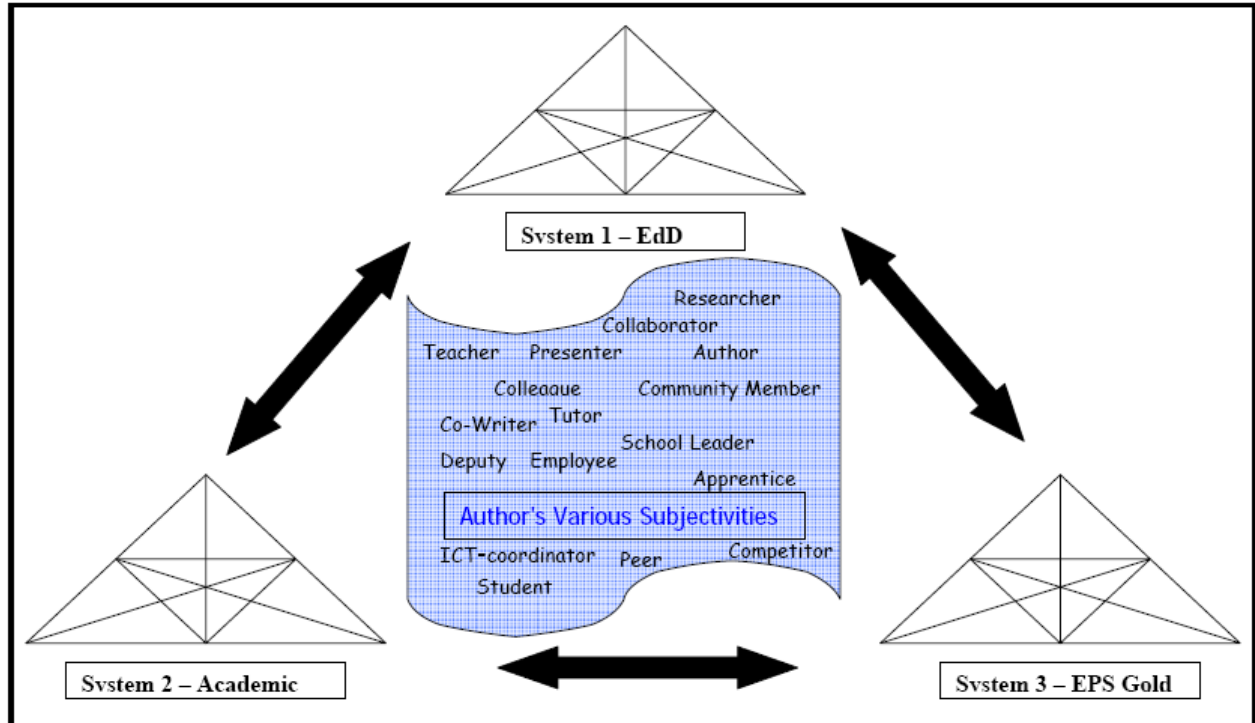
In reconceptualising my RHD journey I propose a new systems model (Figure Five - The Academic World of the Author – An Activity Systems and Membership Categorisation

Perspective) that utilises both an Activity Systems approach, which affords powerful examination of the structural elements of my journey (namely community, DOL, Rules and Tools), and also a more individualistic, phenomenological approach utilising Member Categorisation which emphasises the role of active subjects.

Figure Five. System One (Reconceptualised Academic World)

Member Categorisation (Baker, 1997) theorises the role of active subjects and active

The Academic World of the Author – An Activity Systems and Membership Categorisation Perspective



subjectivities and suggests that subjects choose from a range of roles according to the particular context in which they find themselves. How people describe things and how they reason about them are a pragmatic selection from a range of possibilities and turning category identifications, e.g. an individual may identify as a 'mother' a 'teacher' or a 'researcher'. Each may be correct identifiers of the same person but the selection made calls on very different domains of knowledge and reason (Baker, 1997, p, 132). In terms of my model, the ways that I position myself within the various systems has implications in terms of my engagement with other elements of those systems (Daniels & Warmington, 2007) e.g. my relationship to supervisors; my utilisation of university resources

In initial iterations of this model, I represented my academic journey with three interconnecting systems. This is the traditional configuring of systems, evidenced in the works of Elks (2005), and Suratmethakul (2005). In this traditional view one system becomes a subset of another system which is a subset of another system and so on. The more I reflected on my journey, the clearer it became to me that the sequentialisation of my journey, although neatly

articulated, did not truly reflect either the convoluted nature of the various elements of the systems or the fact that I chose to exhibit, or am categorised as, various subjectivities. Figure Five is the current representation of a number of iterations which sought to better represent the agency I can exert in choosing my manner of involvement at the various systemic stages. This model provides a representation of this journey utilising both Activity Theory and Member Categorisation. It overcomes the depersonalisation of this journey by establishing a personal relevance via the utilisation of Member Categorisation and recognises that an individual's identities and subjectivities shape their agentic action.

In my particular instance, I interact with the Activity Systems in which I am a part in a unique way and this uniqueness arises from the distinct and individual pathway that constitutes my individual ontogeny (Billett, 2006). Thus I can be researcher, peer, tutor, author, or student. I am able, within the EPS Community of Practice, to assume a variety of positionings within each system or across all three systems. The recognition that subjects can be active in the pursuit of their goals mitigates the potential over-socialisation of the individual. Without an understanding that individuals make individual choices based on their ontogeny, the subject in a system can become merely a representation of a conglomerate of subjects, in other words I become a 'RHD student'; or a 'university tutor'; or 'an author'. Whilst these labels are useful for managing relationships within the community, in terms of Rules or Division of Labour, they are unable to reveal the granular nature of any particular, individual journey. To clarify this point I would like to reflect on two subjectivities, 'becoming a peer' and 'becoming an author', which I have employed in my journey. Both these subjectivities form a part of a tapestry of experiences that are identified and investigated by Brown et al. (2007) as they determine the epistemological stance being constructed by the authors of the different papers initially presented at the 2006 Educational Research: Who Needs It? RHD Conference.

By asking where the author located the research being reported, within a research paradigm / methodology, or within an educational debate, or within a policy shift / dilemma – we were endeavouring to determine where the author positioned her / his work and in so doing gain insights into where the author positioned her / himself in relation to the research community of practice, that is, as a 'peer', 'student' or 'educator' (Brown, et al., 2007, p. 12 - 13).

The three categories used by the authors of this paper reflect, from my understanding, a number of possible subjectivities within the RHD journey; 'peer' indicates a person at the end of the journey with the PhD / EdD almost in sight, and a publication record; 'student' indicates a person somewhere along the journey but predominantly within an academic discourse; whilst 'educator' indicates a person completing a professional doctorate working full time and studying part time. My reflections on my journey include elements of all three of these positionings and, whilst roughly following the linear course of educator – student – peer are often in a state of flux. In some sense I was a peer within the first year of my study but for the last two would best be categorised as a student who, whilst meeting the requirements of the EdD course structure, am also working on two pieces of writing which more appropriately fall into the category of 'peer' – namely this symposium and a second paper to be presented at an RHD conference. Always present in my journey on both an ontological and practical level is myself as educator – primarily in a school based context and secondarily as a university tutor.

In their chapter, Brown et al. (2007, p. 15) reflect on the value of providing opportunities for authorship

Providing students with access to mature sites of research practice, such as conferences and book publications, that lay outside of the thesis writing process may be beneficial in assisting students to change the ways in which they relate to the research community of practice.

The opportunity to present and then publish a paper in 2007 was critical to me at a number of levels – at a fundamental level it helped me to believe that perhaps I could belong to the academic community and that I was not a pretender, an impostor or merely a student skilled at presenting work that my lecturers would rate highly. At a creative level, it was the first time that I had written something that would later become part of a broader academic community, and read (hopefully) by someone other than a person marking my work. The experience of being an author was a pivotal moment in my development as an ‘academic in waiting’ and I am very excited, and hopeful of again publishing a piece of my own work. The RHD paper changed my personal perception of membership of the broader academic community but not specifically my membership of EPS (Gold Coast). This is similar, by way of example to the situation whereby successfully completing a teaching degree makes you part of the community of Queensland teachers, but only significant involvement in a school creates a sense of membership in that particular community of practice. The core tension here, to return to Activity Theory terminology, is that you cannot become an authentic member of a community of practice in any meaningful sense until you become an actual member of the community via an official process. I was therefore disappointed that I was unable to be considered for a secondment to Griffith University last year, due to the fact that I am not an Education Queensland employee. Apart from the opportunity to develop research and pedagogical skills appropriate to a tertiary level, I also missed the opportunity to become a recognised member of the EPS community of practice.

In sharing my journey I am conscious that the words I have used, and the models that I have created, can only but paint an incomplete picture of the experience. Vygotsky (1978) introduced the concept of Inner and Outer Speech. Once our Inner Speech (thoughts) are articulated in Outer Speech (words) there meaning is changed, diluted, and to a certain extent ‘lost in translation’. Mendelssohn is quoted as saying that his music expresses ‘not thoughts that are too vague to be put into words but thoughts that are too precise’ (Seaton, 2001, p. 6). Whilst certainly not claiming the eloquence of Mendelssohn, attempting to accurately portray the personal dimensions of my journey with words is a similarly difficult task. Denzin in (Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 101) notes

The subject is more than can be contained in a text, and a text is only a reproduction of what the subject has told us. Language, which is our window into the subject’s world [and our world], plays tricks. It displaces the very thing it is supposed to represent, so that what is always given is a trace of other things, not the thing – lived experience – itself

The purpose of this paper has been an attempt to describe, using words and models, a complex and intimate journey of self awareness, self learning and self discovery. It has argued that Activity Theory is an appropriate theoretical construct for an exploration of the interconnected elements of such a journey, particularly in relation to the Division of Labour and Community Rules. It has also indicated that the resolution of tensions within these systems provides opportunities for individual and communal transformation. Finally, the paper has identified that an Activity System approach does not clearly identify or communicate the

individual subjectivities which are evident in an RHD Journey. A new model was suggested which remains coherent with an Activity Systems framework but at the same time expresses the range of subjectivities that an individual utilises in daily interaction with the system.

In closing, the doctoral journey has been the most difficult cognitive challenge I have yet encountered, and I still have the thesis to come. All who read this paper, or attend this conference, have their own story, their own journey. In presenting my journey, via the conceptual framework of Activity Systems and Member Categorisation, it is hoped that a greater insight can be gained by the reader into their own academic journey. I also thank Ray Brown and Glenn Finger for the invitation to be a colleague in the presentation of this symposium.

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